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COGNITIVE CONSTRICTION IN AGING AND ATTITUDES TOWARD INTERNATIONAL ISSUES.

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THE MAJOR FOCUS OF THIS STUDY WAS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONSTRICTION OF TIME PERSPECTIVE AND PREFERENCES FOR CERTAIN TYPES OF SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS OF INTERNATIONAL, NATIONAL, AND LOCAL AFFAIRS. THREE GROUPS WERE FORMED ACCORDING TO AGE--UNDER 40, 40-59, AND 60 AND OVER. TABLES SHOW, IN PERCENTAGES, THE RESPONSES TO SUCH QUESTIONS AS WHAT THE UNITED STATES SHOULD DO IN KOREA, BOMBING OF COMMUNIST CHINA, FOREIGN AID, DISCIPLINE IN SCHOOLS, AND DELINQUENTS. RESULTS STRONGLY SUGGEST THAT A PERSON'S PREFERENCES FOR SOLUTIONS TO SUCH PROBLEMS ARE RELATED TO AGE. THE OLDER ADULTS PREFER SOLUTIONS WHICH TERMINATE PROBLEMS RAPIDLY. EVIDENCE INDICATED THAT THIS WAS A RESULT OF RESTRICTED TIME PERSPECTIVE AND THE TENDENCY TO ATTRIBUTE CAUSALITY TO THE ACT OR SITUATION, RATHER THAN ENVIRONMENT. THIS DOCUMENT IS CHAPTER 21, IN SOCIAL ASPECTS OF AGING, EDITED BY IDA H. SIMPSON, AND JOHN C. MCKINNEY, WHICH IS AVAILABLE FROM DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS, DURHAM, N.C. (PT)

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21. COGNITIVE CONSTRICTION IN AGING AND ATTITUDES TOWARD INTERNATIONAL ISSUES*

The notion of effective life space has thus far been treated with a broad brush. The definition of life space as the extent of the world that a person is willing to accept as relevant to his conduct is explicitly vague and imprecise. Although the term bears an obvious similarity to early formulations of Kurt Lewin,[1] caution has been exercised in endowing it with various field theoretical properties. Indeed, at this stage of theorizing there are several reasons for purposely allowing this nodal construct to remain in its ambiguous state.[2] For one, in its general form the term has many implications which would not be as apparent with a more concrete definition. It encourages an extension of initial thinking with such diverse areas as social perception, phenomenology, decision-making theory, phenomenal time, existentialism, and others. In addition, the general form of the construct is advantageous in that it does not commit one to a single set of operational procedures nor to a single source of data.

* Based on "Aging, Time Perspective, and Preferred Solutions to International Conflicts," by the same authors, which appeared in *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 9 (June, 1965), 177-186.

1. *Principles of Topological Psychology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1936).

2. For a more detailed account of the functions and advantages of theoretical terms of this type, see Rudolph Carnap, "The Methodological Character of Theoretical Concepts," in Herbert Feigl and Michael Scriven (eds.), *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), I, 38-76; or Kurt W. Back's notion of "myth language," in "The Game and the Myth as Two Languages of Social Science," *Behavioral Science*, 8 (1963), 66-71.

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If anything, the foregoing chapters would attest to the wide diversity of data which can be seen as relevant.

The present chapter represents an attempt to deal with a single aspect of the life space in greater detail and to demonstrate the relevancy of this derivation to attitudes toward international relations. More specifically, the interest is in the ramifications of the above discussion (see Chapters 18 and 19) concerning the effects of aging on the constriction of the life space, in general, and the constriction of time perspective, in particular. The relationship between constriction of time perspective and preferences for certain types of solutions to problems in international relations constitutes the major focus.

Although there are certainly a number of environmental conditions which can influence a person's solutions to international problems, it might be said that each person possesses a particular orientation to life which will predispose him toward making certain kinds of choices regardless of environmental circumstances. A person who consistently regards others with suspicion, for example, should react in a fairly predictable fashion to peace overtures by other nations. Among such personal dimensions a person's orientation in time would seem to have considerable importance for the types of solutions he prefers. More specifically, when little future time is taken into account, more immediate or total solutions should be preferred. If the future is not relevant for an individual, then solving a problem in the present should be more appealing. In addition, looking into the future also implies a consideration of additional aspects of a problem. The more aspects of a problem that are considered, the less extreme or complete can any solution be. These notions have been supported by evidence presented in an earlier paper.[3]

Time perspective may be affected by several factors. Immediate changes in the environment can often cause shifts in mood; empirical evidence seems to indicate, for example, that reminding one of his personal death can restrict his time perspective.[4] A lack of time perspective can also result from a lack of education. On the other hand, there may be some intrinsic factors which render individuals

3. Kurt W. Back and Kenneth J. Gergen, "Individual Orientations, Public Opinion and the Study of International Relations," *Social Problems*, 2 (1963), 77-87.

4. Paul Wohlford, "An Investigation into some Determinants of Extension of Personal Time" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1964).

more or less susceptible to whatever environmental conditions prevail. One such factor would seem to be the position of a person in his life span. Does the person who has many fruitful and absorbing years ahead of him perceive events with the same perspective as one who has passed the peak of his productivity and faces the end of life? The answer would seem to be "no." Earlier work has shown a direct relationship between aging and indices of time perspective. The young adult population tends to take into account more of the future than does the aged population. Similarly, in a study of planning in three-generation families, Reuben Hill[5] found that members of the older generation planned least, had proportionately more indefinite and short-run plans, and executed fewer plans than the two younger generations.

The rationale for this link between one's temporal orientation and aging may be complex. It would seem that the aged person does not consider far distant events primarily because he does not project his existence far into the future. Fewer future contingencies may thus be considered by the elderly person in his attempts to come to grips with present problems. With few contingencies to consider, solutions may tend to be more absolute or extreme. In addition, total solutions to problems may be more appealing because they promise an immediate end to the problem rather than continued ambiguity. It is not necessary to wait months or years to see the problem resolved. As Shaw's character, Captain Shotover, remarks, "Take care: I am in my dotage. Old men are dangerous: it doesn't matter to them what is going to happen to the world."

To summarize thus far, it can be reasoned that the aged person may prefer resolving international problems in a more immediate or extremist fashion. Because of a restricted temporal orientation, he may avoid solutions which extend into the distant future, and his solutions will often reflect a lack of attention to future contingencies. The focus of this paper, first of all, will be on the relationship between age and preferred solutions to problems of international scope. Secondly, in order to test the generality of these findings, the relationship between age and a number of national and local problems will be examined. Since temporal orientations should tend to permeate all choices, there should conceivably be a con-

5. "Decision Making and the Family Life Cycle," in Ethel Shanas and Gordon Strieb (eds.), *Social Structure and the Family: Generational Relations* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965).

tinuity in types of solutions preferred over a variety of problems. Finally, an additional implication growing out of the relationship between aging and time perspective will be examined. Specifically, time perspective may be highly related to the range and type of causal agents considered. If this is so, then aging would lead to modifications in the perception of the causation of events.

RESULTS

Attitudes Toward International Problems

Problems which most directly bear on the hypothesis that aging leads to preference for short-range solutions are those which offer the following alternative solutions: (*1*) *annihilation*, or the aggressive stamping out of the person or persons creating the problem; (2) *denial* of the problem, which may take the form of withdrawal from the area of difficulty; and (*3*) *compromise*, or the finding of a solution which lies in an intermediate position in comparison to the other alternatives. Following the above discussion, the first two of these alternatives would fit into the category of short-range solutions; either course of action would lead to an immediate end to the problem (though perhaps not a lasting one). The third, more moderate, alternative would follow from a more long-range view of world events. If future repercussions of present action are taken into account, then such a solution should be preferred.

From the data available for examination, four questions offering these alternatives were found. Two of these questions dealt with the Korean crisis and two with cold war situations. For three of these questions, three age groups could be formed (under forty, forty to fifty-nine, and sixty years and over), and preferences for extreme solutions could be examined as they related to age. The results for these three questions appear in Table 1. As can be seen, for two of these questions there is a positive, monotonic relationship between age and preference for both of the short-range solutions. For the third item, concerning U. S. action in the Korean War, there is a clear increase in preference for short-range solutions between the under forty and forty to fifty-nine groups; however, such preferences tend to drop slightly after age sixty. In general, these results would seem to support expectations.

Table 1. Aging and Preferences for Short-Range Solutions to International Problems (in percentages).

		Under 40	40–59	60 and over
1. Under what circumstances do you think the United States should go to war with Russia?	Slight provocation	10.8	13.9	16.9
	Never fight	7.1	8.6	10.8
	Total short-range	17.9	22.5	27.7
	Moderate	82.1	77.5	72.3
	(*N*)	(619)	(533)	(213)
2. What should the United States do about fighting in Korea?	Greater aggression	6.3	6.5	15.4
	Pacifism	9.9	11.8	21.4
	Total short-range	16.2	18.3	36.8
	Moderate	83.8	81.7	63.2
	(*N*)	(335)	(279)	(117)
3. What should the United States do next in war with Korea?	Extreme war	26.2	31.1	30.3
	Extreme peace	14.0	19.7	16.5
	Total short-range	40.2	50.8	46.8
	Moderate	59.8	49.2	53.2
	(*N*)	(343)	(264)	(109)

Source: AIPO #415, March, 1948; #457, June, 1950; #474, April, 1951.

The fourth item, from a Roper survey taken in 1950, was given to two groups of respondents of different ages (one eighteen to twenty-five years and the other forty to fifty-five years). They were asked which of the following statements they came closest to agreeing with:

a. Russia has to be stopped and the best way is to fight before they get any stronger.
b. While Russia must be stopped, we have a good chance of avoiding war by keeping prepared and showing them we mean business.
c. The most important thing is for this country not to get into another war—regardless of what happens in the rest of the world.

Following the above line of thought, for this question both the first and third answers were considered short-range alternatives. The results indicate that the more elderly group preferred both of the short-range solutions more than the younger group did. The younger group, on the other hand, preferred the moderate solution. Although these differences were only slight (younger group preference for

Table 2. Aging and Preferences for Short-Range Solutions to International Problems (in percentages).

	Under 40	40–59	60 and over
1. Advocate U. N. bombing of Communist China	52.4 (433)	56.8 (315)	60.2 (128)
2. Advocate sending fewer foods and supplies to Europe	34.6 (627)	38.1 (517)	40.2 (251)
3. Against foreign aid	32.9 (547)	42.6 (507)	46.7 (261)

Source: AIPO #474, April, 1951; #399, June, 1947; #596, March, 1958.

extremes = 22.4 per cent, older group = 26.4 per cent), a χ^2 test between the two groups was significant at beyond the .01 level.

A second group of questions offered additional support. For these questions only two alternative answers were offered, and in each case it was felt that one of the alternatives represented a greater consideration of the future than the other. The first, which appeared on a survey during the Korean War, asked whether the respondent advocated the United Nations carrying the war into Communist China. As this would ultimately mean a total annihilation of the source of the Korean conflict, it was felt that this was a short-range solution. As can be seen in Table 2, again it is found that the aged preferred the short-range solution to a greater extent. Additional support for the present interpretations was found by subdividing each age group into those who felt that provoking Red China would bring all-out war versus those who did not feel so. When responses to the question of whether the United Nations forces should attack Communist China or not are considered as a result of age *and* predictions of an all-out war, it is found that the result shown in Table 2 is accounted for almost entirely by those in each age group who felt that there *would* be a resultant world war. In other words, when no world war was expected there was virtually no difference among the age groups in advocating the bombing of Red China. When world war was anticipated as a result of this bombing, the aged preferred the bombing to a significantly greater extent than the younger group.

Two additional questions dealt with foreign aid. Foreign aid in any form was felt to be an example of a long-range method for insuring the spread of democracy around the world and the ultimate defeat of communism. Short-range alternatives to such a

problem would include a direct assault on Russia (annihilation) or the adoption of a complete isolationist position (denial). As can be seen in Table 2, for both questions regarding foreign aid the results were as anticipated: the elderly were more opposed to foreign aid than the younger groups.

Attitudes Toward National and Local Problems

As mentioned above, a second aim of this paper was to explore the continuity of preferences for short-range solutions among the aged from problems of international scope to those of national as well as local importance. In the first of the relevant surveys, the following problem was raised:

> During the next 13 years some 41,000 miles of new highways will be built by the U. S. Government. Do you think that the Government should or should not do something about the billboards, advertising signs, and the like along these new highways?

The short-range solution to the problem of billboards, of course, would be to have the government step in and *do* something. As Table 3 indicates, this was indeed the choice of the elderly population to a greater extent than the younger. It was further asked *what* the government should do: forbid, regulate, or do nothing. Looking at only those who on the first question advocated the government's stepping in, the percentage of persons feeling that the government should "forbid all advertising" versus "regulate" was analyzed. It was felt that the former alternative to a greater extent than the latter would represent a way of handling the entire problem on an immediate basis. Here too the aged advocated "forbidding" to a greater extent than the younger groups. A problem which was somewhat similar in nature dealt with professional boxing. When this was raised we again find that the elderly preferred to handle the problem by banning boxing altogether.

The Roper survey, in which only the two age groups participated, again included a question which offered alternatives that seemed to fit the triadic pattern discussed above. The issue concerned whether the present system of private ownership of business should remain, change gradually so that the government takes over basic industries, or shift completely to governmental control. Whereas the first alternative seemed to represent a denial of the fact that

there is a problem, and the third an annihilation of the problem, the second alternative seemed to represent a more long-range approach. For this problem the elderly group preferred both the first and third alternatives to a greater extent than the younger group did. Again the total differences were not large (younger group preference for extremes = 83.2 per cent, older group = 88.3 per cent); but this difference also proved to be statistically reliable ($\chi^2 = 18.91$; $p < .001$).

A second group of questions dealt with attitudes toward various aspects of child rearing and training. In bearing the responsibility for a child's adjustment to society, at least one dimension along which parental tactics may vary is that of discipline. Extreme punishment or coercion would be one way of achieving at least the overt behavior desired from a child on an *immediate* basis (though future repercussions are almost sure to result). On the other hand, denial of the problem would be represented by simply turning one's back on the child's behavior. Some intermediate level of discipline, it would seem, would treat the future of the child with more reasonableness. Although there was no evidence concerning denial, three questions did offer punitive alternatives which were rather extreme versus rather moderate. As can be seen in Table 3, for each of these questions preferences for alternatives of greater reliance on punishment increased with age. The elderly preferred to a greater extent to publish the names of teen-age first offenders and advocated stricter discipline in both the home and school.

Table 3. Aging and Preferences for Short-Range Solutions to National and Local Problems (in percentages).

	Under 40	40–59	60 and over
1. Advocate doing something about billboards	62.6 (546)	78.5 (530)	81.0 (226)
2. Advocate "forbidding" rather than regulating billboards	15.8 (467)	28.5 (474)	27.7 (188)
3. Adovcate banning of boxing	40.9 (562)	50.0 (416)	53.1 (236)
4. Advocate publishing names of teen-agers in trouble for first time	29.5 (525)	33.0 (522)	41.0 (307)
5. Believe discipline in homes not strict enough	70.4 (115)	75.0 (204)	77.7 (166)
6. Believe discipline in schools not strict enough	85.2 (122)	89.1 (211)	92.8 (167)

Source: AIPO #580, March, 1957 (1,2); #549, June, 1955 (3); #588, August, 1957 (4); #538, October, 1954 (5,6).

Aging and the Perception of Causality

These latter findings, indicating that the aged tend to prefer stricter measures in dealing with the young, appear to have additional implications. These findings would also seem to indicate that the aged person may be much less concerned with the notion that the environmental influences to which a person is subjected may influence him profoundly in later years. In a sense, this means that individuals are treated as if their personalities are constant. From this point of view, environmental influences may control behavior in a situation, but basic personality does not change. If behavior of an opponent depends mainly on unchanging personality, it is reasonable to come quickly to a settlement, either giving in or seeking quick victory. If environmental conditions are thought to be paramount, a slower procedure for changing these conditions is indicated.

Phrasing this argument in a slightly different way, it would seem that the elderly person may tend to restrict the scope of causal sequence. Rather than perceiving a person's behavior as the result of his history or other factors impinging on him, his behavior may be viewed more as resulting from the internal characteristics of the person alone. In Fritz Heider's[6] terms, the locus of causality for behavioral events may be viewed as more intrinsic than extrinsic to the person. Such a view of causality would also seem to follow directly from the consideration of the aged person's orientation in the world. If his orientation in time and space indeed is more restricted—as earlier evidence has indicated—such a restriction should directly affect his perception of causality. In other words, the concept of extrinsic causation is based almost entirely on a consideration of the temporal and spatial context in which an event occurs. For example, it is often too easy to judge a person's behavior negatively when we are not aware of the early events which might have affected him. Similarly, governmental actions, especially the actions of foreign governments, may be judged harshly when one is not aware of all the factors in the environment which influenced these actions. If temporal and spatial orientations are not extended, the view of the causal locus of a person's actions will seem to reside

6. "Social Perception and Phenomenal Causality," *Psychological Review*, **51** (1944), 358-374.

more in the person than in the environment in which he has lived or is living.

Some additional support for this view was found in a Roper survey on mental health taken in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1950. In this survey a number of hypothetical case histories were presented, and the respondent was asked what he would do about the person involved. These questions were of the open-ended variety, and responses were naturally quite varied. However, for three of these case histories several of the response categories cohered and it was possible to delineate two types of preferences: *punitive* (incarceration, direct punishment, social isolation, etc.) and *environmental change* (changing the living or working environment, increasing understanding of others, psychiatry, etc.). The following items were responded to with either one or both of these types of responses:

1. Now I'd like to ask you a question about a fifteen-year-old boy who has been in trouble repeatedly for staying away from school and has recently stolen an automobile.
2. Now here's a woman who became suspicious of her neighbors and falsely accused them of saying things about her.
3. Here's a middle-aged man who lost interest in his work, worried about everything and thought life was not worth living.

If the above speculations are correct, it might be expected that the aged person, because of his restricted view of time and thus of causality, would tend to recommend that punitive measures be

Table 4. Aging and Preferences for Punitivity vs. Environmental Change (in percentages).

		Age		
		Under 40	40–59	60 and over
1. Juvenile delinquent	Punish	34.0%	39.4%	47.4%
	Change environment	18.5	12.5	11.3
	(*N*)	(1256)	(829)	(310)
2. Suspicious woman	Punish	36.8	43.3	43.0
	Change environment	32.6	26.8	22.3
	(*N*)	(842)	(522)	(184)
3. Worried man	(No punish alternative)			
	Change environment	31.2	21.5	16.0
	(*N*)	(1269)	(781)	(257)

Source: Roper Poll, Com. 43.

taken. On the other hand, the aged person should be less inclined to choose the type of alternative which would view the person's personality as the result of extrinsic determining factors, i.e., the environmental change alternative. As can be seen in Table 4, the expectations are fully supported. In each case, indorsement of the punitive alternatives increases with age, and indorsement of the environmental change alternative decreases. Although these results are at least suggestive, it goes without saying that the possibility of modifications in the perception of causality as a result of aging needs much more direct empirical verification.

DISCUSSION

Personality of the Aging

The above findings would seem to indicate that, in regard to a wide variety of problems, the aged population in the United States tends to prefer more short-range or extreme solutions. This appears to be the case, not only with problems of international scope, but also with national as well as interpersonal problems. It has also been reasoned that such preferences are the result of a limited time perspective, and that the constriction of time perspective is a normal result of the aging process. It was further suggested that one result of a constriction in temporal orientation was a modified perception of causality. For the aged individual, a person's actions may be viewed as resulting more likely from internal or intrinsic factors rather than as having been environmentally produced.

Although the present results were generally consistent with the time perspective rationale, there are several additional considerations. Although earlier work indicated that the aged person has a more restricted time perspective, this is certainly not the only characteristic of the personality make-up of the aged person. There is some evidence that he may also be limited in space perspective. Rather than taking into account aspects of the world at large when dealing with pressing problems, the aged person may tend to consider only those factors which are in close proximity to him. It has also been argued that when only a few factors are considered relevant to the solving of a problem, the resolution of such a problem will tend to be extreme. When many factors are considered,

resolutions will ordinarily represent some *compromise* among the various factors. Thus, in many of the instances cited above, a prediction on the basis of delimited space perspective would have been quite relevant.

There is also abundant evidence that age tends to be related to education; more elderly citizens are generally less well educated than younger adults. Earlier research[7] has also shown that those with little education tend to have a more constricted time perspective. The question arises as to whether education could account for the above results. To check on this possibility, a random selection of the items used above were analyzed, using both age and education as predicting variables. The results of these analyses indicated that age, independent of educational level, was generally related to preferences for short-term solutions. However, it should be noted that although respondents with either a grammar or high school education (grades zero through eight, or nine through twelve) confirmed the hypothesis, for college-educated respondents (above the twelfth grade) the relationship was much less marked and in some cases absent.

Additional factors may also enter the picture. It has been noted that the aged respondent reacts differently in the interviewing situation.[8] For example, it may be that the elderly person in the interviewing situation may attempt to avoid role expectations; he may attempt to shock a young interviewer by responding in a very extreme fashion. Such an interpretation could also account for some of the present findings. Elaine Cumming and William E. Henry[9] have also theorized that the process of aging is one of progressive social disengagement, which may manifest itself and lead to the expression of more idiosyncratic or extremist views (defined as deviations from the norms) in the interviewing situation.

Thus, although the present results are certainly consistent with the time perspective rationale, they are not necessarily inexplicable from other points of view. Although such is the case in almost all studies which use age as an independent variable, there is an important point to be made here. Freud often pointed out that be-

7. Kurt W. Back and Kenneth J. Gergen, "Apocalyptic and Serial Time Orientations and the structure of Public Opinion," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, **27** (1963), 427-442.

8. Kenneth J. Gergen and Kurt W. Back, "The Disengaged Respondent," *Public Opinion Quarterly* (in preparation).

9. *Growing Old* (New York: Basic Books, 1961).

havior is not simply determined; it is "over-determined." By this he meant that any behavior is the final common path for a multitude of processes. To explain any behavioral event in only one way did not exhaust the meaning of the behavior; rather, each explanation only dealt with a different aspect of the same behavior. In essence, this is the problem faced by any researcher in dealing with the behavior of the aged individual. Any behavior of the aged person is the final common path of many different processes—processes which have been modified to some extent by the fact of his growing old.

SUMMARY

The present study seems to suggest very strongly that a person's preferences for solutions to problems of international, national, and local import are related to his age. More specifically, the aged person tends to prefer those solutions which would terminate such problems as rapidly as possible. Evidence was presented indicating that such preferences were a function of the aged person's restricted time perspective and his tendency to attribute causality to the act or to a situation rather than to environmental circumstances.

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